SNOWBOUND WITH JOHN WILKES BOOTH AT CAMERON, MO.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

To one of the great upheavals of nature I was indebted for meeting John Wilkes Booth and remaining in close companionship with him for nearly two weeks.

It was in the winter of 1862-3, when this remarkable genius was thrown upon my hospitality, and notwithstanding the fact that he became the assassin of President Lincoln a few years afterwards, I have ever since regarded him as one of the most fascinating characters with whom I have come in contact during a lifetime that has thrown me in the company of many distinguished persons.

I was the station agent and telegraph operator at Cameron, Mo., through one of the severest snowstorms the country had ever experienced, and which caused great suffering and loss of life and property throughout the Northwest. I became acquainted with Booth. The Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad was at that time the only railroad line in Missouri, and was, in truth, the only railroad running west of the Mississippi River, except a short line running from St. Louis to Warrensburg, which is now a part of the Missouri Pacific system.

Booth Arrived at Cameron on a Snow-Belated Express Train.

The people of North Missouri depended upon the Hannibal road as a means of shipping their oversupply of grain and live stock to Chicago and the Eastern markets, and during that winter an immense number of hogs were gathered near the different stations, awaiting their turn to be shipped eastward.

Cameron, now one of the leading towns of Northwest Missouri, was at the time of which I write only a small station of 100 inhabitants, situated just thirty-five miles east of St. Joseph. The winters thirty or forty years ago were much colder in the Northwest than they are now, and the one I mention especially was the coldest then known.

The citizens of Cameron awoke one morning in December to find a terrific snowstorm prevailing. The storm began some time after midnight, and did not abate its fury for about forty hours. When the fall of snow on the level was discovered to be twenty-eight inches. The wind blew from the northwest during the entire storm, and the snow was drifted in many places as high as twenty feet.

About 6 o'clock on the evening after the beginning of the blizzard the east-bound express arrived at Cameron from St. Joseph in a sorry plight. The train had been fighting its way all day through the fast-drifting snow and could neither proceed on its way or return to St. Joseph on account of the heavy snowdrifts.

Tragedian and His Company Were En Route to St. Louis.

When the storm finally ceased the next afternoon the village of Cameron was practically isolated from the outside world. The railroad was completely blockaded and the snow was so deep and badly drifted the farmers could not get to town. Among the passengers upon the train were John Wilkes Booth and his theatrical company. They were returning from an engagement on the Pacific slope and were billed to appear at DeBar's Opera-house in St. Louis about two weeks from the day they arrived at Cameron. There was but one small hotel in Cameron, and the village was already pretty well crowded with hog and cattle buyers from the East.

The advent of the people on the train made the question of accommodations a very serious one, and the landlord of the hotel was almost distracted in his efforts to make room for his would-be guests.

In the fall I had fitted up a very comfortable room in the depot, where I lodged I took my meals at the hotel.

I observed one very prepossessing gentleman among the theatrical people who spoke with authority and appeared to be one of the leaders of the combination. Some impulse moved me to do my part towards entertaining the snowbound strangers, and I said to him:

"Pardon me, sir, I have quite a comfortable room over in the station house, which I can share with one gentleman until better arrangements can be made."

Prepossessing Stranger Proved to Be Edwin Booth's Brother.

He thanked me heartily for my offer, and extending his hand to me said:

"My name is Booth, and the gentlemen and ladies you see with me compose my theatrical company, who have played together during our Pacific Coast tour. I will be very grateful to you for your generous hospitality, and will be your guest myself until the snows have cleared away sufficiently to permit us to proceed on our journey."

Thus it happened that I was thrown into close companionship with the great actor, which continued for a number of days, and which I have ever since regarded as one of the most pleasant episodes of my lifetime. So agreeable was I entertained by my own guest and so greatly was I often fascinated by this somewhat erratic but singularly remarkable child of genius.

Being a young man, just out of college at the time, I was somewhat impressionable, no doubt, but now, after the lapse of so many years of wider experience, I have found no reason for changing the opinions I formed of Wilkes Booth while he was snowbound and my guest at Cameron.

We were together almost all of the time during the snow blockade, for we took our meals together, slept together and Booth made my office his headquarters during the mornings and afternoons.

Some of John Wilkes Booth's Jekyll and Hyde Characteristics.

He was so different to any man I have ever met before or since it is impossible to give the reader a proper idea of his unique personality and peculiar characteristics by drawing comparisons between himself and any one else. There was not an hour during the entire time he remained with me that some new and interesting phase of his character was not unfolded to me, and I was continually wondering to myself what kind of a human being the winter winds and snow had suddenly cast upon my commonplace life.

No man was ever more generously endowed with manly strength and beauty, and I have never beheld another man whose face could express so many varied emotions. From a look that was the picture of sunshine and joy, his face could change instantly to one of the deepest dejection and woe. We had not been together but a few days until I discovered that he had practically a dual nature, one of which was of the most lovable and attractive description, whilst the other was morose, taciturn and gloomy.

I have said it was impossible to compare John Wilkes Booth to any other man, but there is one well-known character in fiction whom Booth in a general way strikingly resembled. This person we find in "The Strange Story of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." If it is possible among the human kind for a man to possess two antagonistic natures, I am confident that Booth's contradictory characteristics were to be accounted for in this way, for it seems utterly impossible for me to reconcile the Booth I learned to admire so much in the little depot at Cameron with one capable of red-handed assassination.

When the report flashed over the country a few years later that President Lincoln had been shot to death in a Washington theater by the noted actor, John Wilkes Booth, I could not believe it until the evidence was emphatic and conclusive.

His whole demeanor toward myself and every one with whom he came in contact at Cameron was so frank, open and generous as to preclude the idea that he was capable of being the ringleader in the tragic event which ended his life career and caused the ignominious death of a number of others.

He Was as Rollicking as the Children Whom He Befriended.

Several little children played around the depot every day while Booth was there, and with these innocent creatures he soon became a prime favorite. He would teach them games and engage in snowball battles with them. Sometimes they would all join against him and give him much the worst of it, but he took it all in perfect good nature and was as rollicking and bolsterous as the best of them.

For many weeks after his departure the little girls and boys would ask me when "Mr. Boots" was coming back again.

He had the masterful faculty of making himself companionable with almost every one, but always retaining their respect and esteem. In fact, it was impossible for any one to come in contact with this remarkable man without recognizing his superiority to ordinary mortals and being charmed with his engaging personality.

Like all great actors, he was fond of literature, but he had his especial favorites, first among whom were Victor Hugo, Sir Walter Scott, Byron, Tennyson and Edgar A. Poe. I used to read an hour or two to him every night, while he would repose on the bed smoking his pipe and comment in an intelligent manner upon what I read to him. He claimed that Tennyson's "Palace of Art" was one of the laureate's masterpieces, but contended that most admirers of that poet failed to read that poem carefully enough to grasp its beautiful structure and poetic imagery, as he termed it.

Habit of Pacing the Floor While Soliloquizing on Hugo.

To some of Victor Hugo's sublime utterances he would listen with rapt attention and then get up and pace the floor while he commented upon the greatness of the author.

"There is a great man," he would remark. "There is a sublimely great man who can do something that is immortal, who can picture what is really grand and glorious, and whose soarings toward the infinite demonstrate to us ordinary human beings what pigmies we are. I would rather be a Hugo, a Byron or a Tennyson for one short day than to be an Alexander, Napoleon of Frederick the Great for a lifetime."

It was during one of these commentaries that his nature would seem to change, and, throwing carelessly aside whatever he happened to have in his hand, and as much as to say: "What is life, anyway?" he would seize his guitar and sing a drinking song or some wild and weird melody, as nobody but Booth himself could render it.

One night I asked him to tell me something about his father and about the early days of the drama in this country, and especially about the barnstorming stories I had often read. He had not indulged in professional talk at all since we had been together, and smiled at my request.

"You want some shop talk, eh?" he replied. "Well, I have been endeavoring to forget as far as possible the prosy rigmarole of the profession while old Boreas is holding me captive. To be candid with you, the profession is a very uninteresting theme with me. I like its great climaxes the same as I do the great upheavals in nature or the meteoric flashes in human life, but the almost endless details, the commonplaces, weary me, although I know they are necessary in the upbuilding of anything."

"Speaking of storming," he continued, "I remember one incident in the career of my father that proved to be the regular thing sure enough, and it was caused by an unfortunate circumstance, the same as has overtaken me here. I was only 10 years old when it happened, but had already played boys' parts and thought I was considerable of an actor. The company had been engaged by the citizens of a small town in Central New York to give a performance on Christmas night. The new town hall, or opera-house, was to be dedicated that night, and the people had gotten up a programme for both day and night that was to make that Christmas one of the red-letter days in the history of the town. Our company arrived there Christmas Eve and was given an honorable reception by the Mayor and leading citizens. Men, women and children looked forward to the coming day as the small boy generally anticipates the advent of a circus into a village. But, alas, when Christmas morning dawned, the opera-house was a mass of smouldering ruins.

Famous Old Tragedian Almost Shed Tears Over Disappointment.

"My father was in despair and the people almost shed tears over what they considered a dire calamity. After breakfast my father went out for a walk, no doubt for the purpose of trying to shake off the keen disappointment he felt. In less than an hour he returned to the hotel, full of energy, and said to the members of the company: 'The show will be given. Let every one get ready to lend a helping hand, for much work will have to be done before night.'

"It seems that in strolling around town my father passed a large frame structure that was just being completed and was intended for a livery stable and barn. The idea at once occurred to him that the building could be used for a theater, and he lost no time in making satisfactory arrangements with the owner. It soon became known all over town that the performance was to take place. Scores of men came forward and volunteered to assist in getting the house ready for the play. The citizens donated chairs, tables and anything else they possessed that was needed for the night's entertainment, and before supper time the company congratulated itself upon having constructed a very good place for the performance.

"Big turkey dinners, fireworks and the drinking of eggnogg had been the order of day and at night every one was primed for the theatrical performance.

"The town was crowded with visitors from the surrounding country, and when the box office opened my father had the pleasure of seeing hundreds in line ready to go in. By 8 o'clock the huge pile of money had been taken in, and every seat was full, with a number standing up in the aisles.

Pile of Gold and Silver Enthused Every Member of the Company.

"During my whole career since that night I have never seen a company of actors who were more enthusiastic and filled with a desire to do their very best than my father's company was on this occasion. The old gentleman himself, after glancing at the big pile of silver and gold on the treasurer's table, was full of fire and the entertainment opened with a grand hurrah. The play was 'Richard III,' and my father said ever afterwards that during his whole life before the footlights he had never beheld a play rendered with more genuine energy and enthusiasm, wherein the actors played their different parts as artistically as if they were playing to a royal audience.

Several little children played around the depot every day while Booth was there—sometimes they would all join against him and give him much the worst of it.

"The circumstance added much to the realism of the affair, as a barnstorming enterprise. The room adjoining, intended for the vehicle department of the stable, was utilized that night for the accommodation of the horses and mules. The partition had not been entirely completed between the two rooms, and the audience could plainly observe the animals munching their hay in the stalls."

Here Booth chuckled to himself and remarked: "Wonder if Richard would have offered his kingdom for a horse, if the animals were as plentiful and convenient on the real Bosworth field as they were at this mimic representation. Besides he might have had the choice of a horse or a mule, whichever was best suited to his necessities.

Festivities Ended With a Wedding and an All-Night Ball.

"The festivities ended with a wedding and a grand ball at the hotel, which lasted until morning, with almost every one in a condition which might be termed comfortably drunk. Of course 'the ghost walked' like a lord that morning and the company took its departure, feeling greatly elated over the success of what promised at first to be a dismal failure."

Three or four mornings after Booth's arrival he came rushing into the depot office in a state of almost convulsive merriment. "Come with me," he said, "and I will show you something that will make you feel like dropping to the floor."

I had an idea of what he had discovered, but said nothing and went along with him. We crossed the railroad track and entered the one saloon in town, kept by John Shurtz. A score of men were standing around and Shurtz was busy thawing out his bottles of whisky, which had been frozen solid and which he thawed out every morning by placing them on a frame structure around the stove. Here each morning a thirsty crowd would wait while their morning dram was converted into liquid form. During those war days the adulteration of whisky had become an old story to Missourians, but the thawing out process caused Booth the greatest amusement while he remained snowbound.

He would go over every morning and watch the saloonkeeper at his work and upon his return indulge in the drollest and most amusing comments upon the peculiar procedure. "I have seen the time," he would remark, "when I couldn't get a drink because I was dead broke and for other reasons, but this is the first time I ever had to wait for them to thaw it out."

Occult Dream of a Hideous Assassination.

It was on the second night, I think, before Booth's departure for the East, when an incident occurred which did not impress me very forcibly at the time, but in the light of subsequent events seemed to be quite remarkable. I have never been much of a believer in Spiritualism, occultism, the communion of souls or anything in that line, and I have no theory to advance now regarding the singular occurrence, but deem the circumstances worthy of relating.

We had retired that night about 12 o'clock after having spent a delightful evening in reading, music and conversation upon different subjects. Along about 2 o'clock I awoke to find myself struggling like a mad man in the arms of Booth, who was doing his utmost to hold me still and awaken me. After becoming thoroughly awakened it required several minutes for me to recover from the experiences I had passed through in a hideous nightmare, when I related the substance of my dream to Booth.

It appeared to me that I was walking along the streets of a large city that were shrouded in darkness to such an extent that I had to feel my way along the buildings. Suddenly a pistol shot disturbed the deathlike stillness and a large building loomed up before me with light flashing from its hundred windows.

I was standing at the entrance of an alley and became all at once panic stricken and started to run through the alley. As, in my dream, I dashed along, the scene seemed to be lit up with meteorlike brightness and I beheld a man emerge from the rear of the building and rush towards me. An impulse seized upon me to bar his way, and as we met he drew a dagger, as if to strike me down. When our eyes met I recognized Booth.

That was all I remembered until I found myself struggling in his arms.

Dream Was Recalled by the Fate of President Lincoln.

The following spring I entered the army, and thought nothing more of the matter, until in 1865, when the country was electrified by the announcement that President Lincoln had been assassinated by John Wilkes Booth. I was stationed at Fayetteville, Ark., at the time, and upon reading the story of the assassination a vivid recollection of my dream in the little depot at Cameron flashed upon me.

A week passed away, and, although the railroad company had a small army of men employed clearing the track, traffic was still wholly interrupted. The telegraph lines had been repaired and a day or two afterwards word came that the road was clear as far west as Chillicothe, which was forty miles east of Cameron. The time was drawing near for Booth to fill his engagement in St. Louis, and as the railroad authorities announced it would require some days longer to clear the track between Chillicothe and Cameron, it became necessary for Booth to invent some means, if possible, of getting to Chillicothe.

Booth Traveled From Cameron to Chillicothe in a Sleigh.

The weather had been extremely cold and the snow was hard enough to bear a sleigh and team, so Booth hit upon the idea of hiring a man to fit up two large sleds with double runners and a huge wagon body upon each one in which the company could traverse the necessary forty miles.

The morning of their departure they filled the wagon bodies with straw and with their numerous wraps and a few buffalo robes were enabled to proceed quite comfortably. Just before getting in the sleigh Booth shook me heartily by the hand and said in his usual captivating manner:

"Good-by; the next time I see you I hope it will be in Washington, where I can reciprocate your hospitality."

Such was John Wilkes Booth as I beheld him in my younger days and I repeat that I have never had occasion for changing my estimate of his character, even after reviewing it from a riper experience of life.

When I remember Booth at this remote day, I find myself comparing him to Byron and Poe, mysterious, inscrutable and gifted with something in his nature that reminds me of the soaring eagle or a flashing star.

W. F. B.

MAKING UP A RAILROAD TIME CARD.

ONE OF THE INTRICATE TASKS CAUSING OFFICIALS TO THINK.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

The relations between the time card of a railroad and the chief train dispatcher are interesting and intricate. Brought down to a simplified form, it might be stated that the time card is the fair-weather governor of a railroad, supplanted, however, by the train dispatcher during a storm, wreck, or any violence or mishap which throws the machinery out of gear. Given fair weather, an absence of delays by accident, or an overcrowding of the track, and the time card of a well-regulated railroad will run all but the wild trains that are picked up hastily to take care of a vast amount of freight business that can be attended to in no other way, or a special passenger train, the schedule of which requires that it be run on other time than as a second section of some well-established passenger train.

The time table in its original form, before it has been reduced to print or even to writing, is a most interesting piece of work. A small boy might describe it as resembling a Sunday-school blackboard on missionary day, the resemblance arising largely from the white background with the black lines, and the pins and the red cord that mark the outline of what will afterwards be reduced to the printed folders. The ordinary train board is about 4 feet in length by 2 feet in height, and is divided longitudinally into first the hours and then the minutes of an entire day. The board has as many divisions as there are stations on the road. These lines, extending from top to bottom and from one side to the other, make the board look like a mass of lines and interlines.

When it comes to making a time card the traffic officials, usually the general passenger agent and his assistants, hold a conference and decide what trains they would like to have, and make their recommendation. After them the freight traffic men relate how many regular trains their service will require, and the two statements are submitted to the president and the operating officials together. The recommendation of the operating officials, headed by the general superintendent, if there be one, usually prevails. If the card be that of the Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad, a section of whose board is shown, the traffic men will announce that they want so many trains a day out of Toledo for Wheeling, and so many out of Wheeling for Toledo and Cleveland.

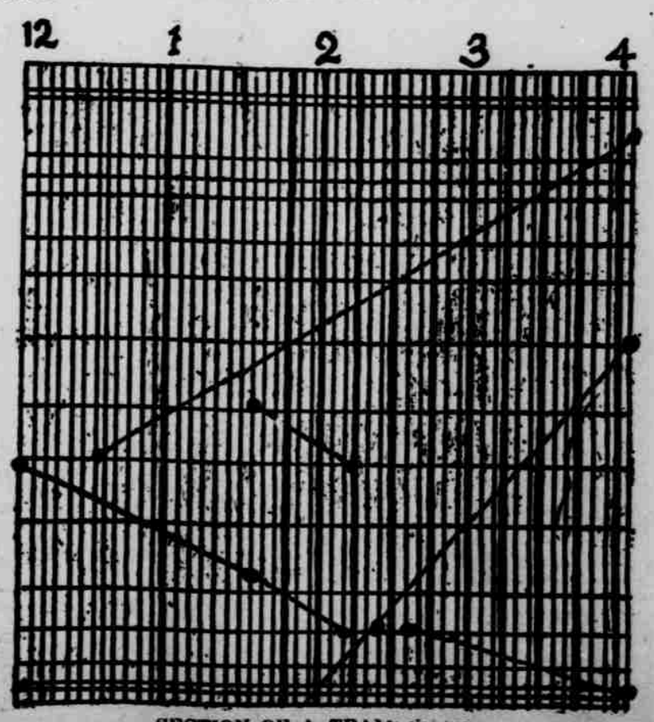
The procedure after that is very simple. The operating men know about the time it is desired to start the train from the terminal, and also know conditions prevailing along the lines which will enable the train to make a certain time between each of the stations. For instance, the distance between Toledo and Manhattan Junction is two and two-tenths miles. The train which leaves at 9:30 o'clock in the morning is a fast one, and, taking the fact that the train must run through the Toledo yards into consideration, it is decided at once to make the running time between those two stations at seven minutes. A pin is placed in the board of the Toledo cross-line at the 9:30 point, and then is slanted diagonally across the board until it strikes Manhattan Junction at 9:37 a. m., or seven minute spaces to the right. Another pin is placed in that point, and the string is fastened to it.

If it should be desired that the train lie over at that point for five minutes, this is noted on the train board by the string being run horizontally on the Manhattan Junction line for five minutes. If the train is supposed to be in motion, again the string is slanted toward the next station. Each southbound train is "strung up," as they term it, in the same manner, until all of the southbound trains have been provided for. The board then would present the appearance of a series of seemingly meaningless lines drawn diagonally on its face.

When it comes to adjusting the running time of the northbound trains to that of the southbound trains, the trouble begins. The northbound trains are marked up on the bottom of the board in a similar manner to those at the top of the board, and as they make progress across the country the lines representing them are creeping nearer to the right-hand side of the board. Naturally, if the road be a long one, the trains meeting will make cross-lines on the map somewhere. The difficulty is for the superintendents to so adjust the running time of these trains to meet the demands of the business and still have them come within the possibilities of the facilities of the track.

For instance, if a through freight train, that always carries forty-five cars, meets another train regularly at a certain place which has about an equal number of cars, one of those trains must be sidetracked; hence it is necessary to cause them to meet at a place where the road has siding facilities for forty-five cars, or more. These little points make it a puzzling task at times to adjust the schedule just right and make the proceedings long drawn out.

After the board has been entirely "strung" the full details of it are taken off and put into printed form, making what they call the working card of the trains. This shows where all of the trains meet, and which trains are supposed to be in the same vicinity at the same time. This working card gives the exact time every train is supposed to be at every point on the road. In case anything happens to prevent the complete carrying out of the dictates of this card, it is a matter for the chief train dispatcher to adjust. It is then that he steps in and takes hold of the reins of the road. At such times he is empowered to change, temporarily, of course, the entire face of the working card, and is enabled to make another card that suits the need of the hour.



SECTION OF A TRAIN BOARD.

Content.

Content to come, content to go,
Content to wrestle or to race
Content to know or not to know,
Each in his place.

Lord, grant us grace to love Thee so,
That glad of heart and glad of face
At last we may sit high or low,
Each in his place.

Where pleasures flow as rivers flow,
And loss has left no barren trace,
And all that are, are perfect so,
Each in his place.